

**To:** Palmer Hough/DC/USEPA/US@EPA[]  
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**Subject:** Bristol Bay mine could harm Oregonians' jobs  
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Bristol Bay mine could harm Oregonians' jobs

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By Guest Columnist

By Ken Morrish

My first real job was on a salmon tender in Alaska's Bristol Bay, when I was 19. We gathered hundreds of thousands of pounds of wild sockeye salmon from the gill-netters and delivered them to a floating cannery.

With the money I made, I bought a VW van, moved to Oregon, and began working on my bachelor's degree. Four years later I headed straight back to Alaska to work as a fly-fishing guide.

That first season was 25 years ago. Today I own a successful Ashland-based business that helps intrepid fly anglers enjoy the world's most pristine and productive fisheries, including Bristol Bay. We employ six Oregonians. Our jobs are built in part on the abundant salmon of Bristol Bay.

We represent roughly a dozen quality lodges in the Bristol Bay region, and I have yet to visit a single one that didn't employ at least one Oregonian.

That is why Oregonians should care that Bristol Bay is under attack by massive foreign mining companies. In the coming weeks, the rivers that feed Bristol Bay will turn blood-red with sockeye salmon stacked back to back. Big rainbow trout, Dolly Varden and grayling will be waiting impatiently for a feast of roe when the salmon spawn.

Bears, eagles, gulls, people -- even the streamside vegetation gorge on hundreds of millions of pounds of rich salmon protein. But this isn't just a natural wonderland; it's an economic engine. Bristol Bay is the most productive wild salmon fishery in the world. There are no dams, no hatcheries, and none of the habitat destruction that decimated salmon runs in the Lower 48, killing the jobs that went with them.

Left basically alone, tens of millions of healthy wild fish will continue to return each year. The fish support a commercial harvest worth roughly \$2 billion annually, at least 50 inland fishing lodges, and dozens of eco-tourism operations. Many of these operations are owned by Oregonians and a remarkable number of "Alaskan" guides likewise call Oregon home. When they come home, they spend their earnings locally on homes and boats, tackle and beer.

The proposed Pebble Mine -- a massive deposit of low-grade gold, copper and molybdenum ore -- lays all of those fish and all those jobs upon a sacrificial altar. Don't think for a minute that this is just another mine. Pebble would be one of the largest open-pit mines in the world.

The largest of its four toxic tailing "ponds" would cover 20 square miles and be held back by the world's largest earthen dam. But even such a massive dike would be no match for the tectonic might of the region. The great Alaska earthquake of 1964 shook the region for five minutes and liquefied hundreds of areas of land.

If this project sat above Coos Bay or the headwaters of one of Oregon's great rivers, Oregonians wouldn't stand for it. But Oregonians cannot dismiss Pebble as some other state's problem. If Bristol Bay were destroyed as an angler's destination, my business would lose more than \$500,000 in annual sales, forcing me to lay off employees. That same threat hovers over many others.

However, there is a way to avert this disaster. The Environmental Protection Agency is assessing the Bristol Bay watershed and could block the mine under the Clean Water Act. So, Oregonians, please write the EPA. Write Sen. Ron Wyden and Sen. Jeff Merkley and tell them to support the EPA in its scientific assessment.

Tell them to protect Bristol Bay. Tell them to protect our livelihoods.

Ken Morrish is co-owner of Fly Water Travel in Ashland. He worked his first season in Alaska's Bristol Bay in 1984.

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